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Retheorizing Empowerment-through-Participation as a Performance in Space: Beyond Tyranny to Transformation

While participatory approaches emanate from a range of political perspectives and traditions and are not inherently feminist, they can offer one means to a practical feminist politics. Participatory approaches aspire to reduce and circumvent the power relations normally involved in research and development and to take the notion of giving the marginalized a voice to new levels by facilitating their involvement in the design, implementation, and outcomes of programs. A substantial literature suggests that by redistributing power and establishing more reciprocal relationships between "insiders" and "outsiders," participatory approaches build ordinary people's capacity to analyze and transform their lives and thus provide one practical means to facilitate empowerment (see, e.g., Chambers 1994, 1997). Amid the plethora of largely positive accounts, *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (Cooke and Kothari 2001b) stands out as a critical challenge to established interpretations. Contributors argue forcefully that the term *participation* is being mobilized to serve a wide variety of political agendas, many of which are not very radical; that participatory approaches can impose, not overcome, power relations when "delivered" as a technocratic cargo; that practitioners have erroneously imagined local communities as discrete and socially homogeneous; that "local knowledge" has been romanticized, intracommunity divisions underemphasized, and the positive contribution of external agents under-

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played; that local-scale action has been prioritized while links to wider processes and institutions have been neglected; and finally that participation is no panacea and has its own practical and theoretical tensions.[1] These are important criticisms, but they extend concerns already mooted by more proparticipation authors.[2] The original contribution of *Participation: The New Tyranny?* lies with those authors who develop a poststructuralist critique of participation and propose that its ills do not result from the shallow use/abuse of techniques by those uncommitted to the philosophy of participation but reflect the fact that even "deep" participation constitutes a form of power that has dominating effects (Cooke and Kothari 2001a).[3]

The extension of poststructuralist critique to this area was certainly overdue, yet *The New Tyranny?* frustrates me because its negative, oppositional tone implies that poststructuralism and participation are inherently antagonistic. I think that a more positive and reciprocal interaction is possible. Thus, while I accept and develop the claims made by Bill Cooke, Uma Kothari, and their colleagues, I also want to interrogate the philosophical and practical limitations of their deconstruction and argue that an exploration of participatory praxis can actually inform poststructuralist theorization. I agree that participation is a form of power but disagree that it can therefore only be resisted. I agree that power cannot be escaped but dispute the unproblematic privileging of resistance. Because I take seriously the claim that power cannot be avoided, I suggest that it must be worked with. I propose that resisting agents must draw on technologies such as participation in order to outmaneuver more domineering forms of power. This formulation allows empowerment-through-participation to be revalorized and retheorized along poststructuralist lines. Finally, I argue that participatory discourses and practices whose effects are empowerment must be seen as spatially embedded. Such a perspective presents important new questions for a renewed and more theoretically aware participatory praxis. Rising to the challenge set by the

[1] Michel Foucault's notion of the "polyvalence" ([1976] 1978, 101) of discourses can help explain the many manifestations of the concept of participation. Adapting a term that in chemistry expresses an element's ability to differentially combine with other elements, Foucault neatly describes how the same discourse can be deployed in ways that achieve quite different effects.

[2] See Mosse 1994; Baylies and Bujra 1995; Cornwall 1998; Guijt and Shah 1998.

[3] For the poststructuralist critique of participation, see Maguire 1987; Lather 1991; Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Hagey 1997.

conference at which this article was originally presented, I attempt a re-theorization that takes "participation beyond tyranny to transformation."[4]

The discussion that follows is necessarily theoretical but is nevertheless grounded in my ongoing research in rural Zimbabwe, which investigates the impacts of the participatory HIV education and empowerment program called Stepping Stones. Originally developed by ActionAid in 1995 for use in Uganda, the Stepping Stones program is now used by many organizations across several continents.[5] Using a manual and illustrative video, Stepping Stones guides facilitators and participants through eighteen three-hour exercises that address key issues around HIV over a twelve-week period. Discussions on sexual health are linked to others about alcohol abuse, money, household decision making, and adolescence. Later sessions develop assertiveness and explore ways in which people can change their behavior and prepare for the future, even in the face of death. Age/sex peer-group meetings are interspersed with mixed sessions, helping individuals, peer groups, and communities to explore their different social, sexual, and psychological needs and analyze the communication blocks they face. While a rather directive approach to participation, the program nevertheless enables participants to reflect on their own experiences using techniques such as role play and diagrammatic visualization.[6] Crucially, the program provides people, particularly women, with an arena within which to "rehearse for reality" the alternative social interactions they have explored (Welbourn 1998; see also n. 5). While Stepping Stones inevitably has its problems and limitations, I have recorded many positive and transformative impacts resulting from the program, including a reduction in men's abuse of alcohol and partners and their increased willingness to write wills protecting their spouses' interests as well as a general increased readiness to care for those with AIDS and an improved ability among women to negotiate domestic arrangements and discuss sexual health (Kesby et al. 2002; see also Welbourn 1998). These changes mark significant improvements in the lives of people facing the horror of HIV/AIDS. They make me want to remain positive about Stepping Stones, and they make me want to find ways to make poststructuralist theory work

[4] The quoted phrase is the title of a conference held at the University of Manchester, February 27–28, 2003.

[5] See the home page of Stepping Stones at http://www.actionaid.org/stratshope/tp.html (last accessed January 27, 2005).

[6] Program author Alice Welbourn defends this directive approach by suggesting that "facipulation," facilitation plus manipulation, is often necessary if men are to discuss gender issues and HIV risk (personal communication, June 2003).

with, not against, participation. Readers will decide for themselves whether the arguments I develop from this case study have relevance to the participatory contexts they know best.

Participation, power, and tyranny

In many areas of development studies, power is still understood in sovereign terms: as a commodity concentrated in the hands of a few, emanating from the top down and from the center outward, and as exercised instrumentally to dominate marginal groups and recreate ideologies that maintain relations of dominance (see, e.g., Maguire 1987). This model underlies discussions on everything from experts' imposition of development agendas to men's refusal to use condoms. A poststructuralist account of power recognizes these effects of power but has a very different view of their production. For Michel Foucault ([1975] 1977, 194; [1976] 1978, 92–102), power is not concentrated; nor is it a commodity to be held, seized, divided, or distributed by individuals. It is a much more decentered and ubiquitous force acting everywhere because it comes from everywhere. Power is not inherent within powerful subjects but is dispersed throughout the complex networks of discourse, practices, and relationships that position subjects as powerful and that justify and facilitate their authority in relation to others (Clegg 1989, 207). Neither is power inherently negative, limiting, or repressive; rather it is inherently productive of actions, effects, and subjects, even when most oppressive. Thus power governs not simply by refusal but also by permission: by telling people what they must be, by enabling and conditioning the possibilities for their action, and by constituting regimes of truth by which they may understand and live their lives. Far from being absent except when exercised, this kind of power is constantly at work within the discourses and practices that structure daily life. Moreover, the effects of power are not intrinsically stable; they appear to be so only if the knowledges and practices constituting prevailing inequalities continue to be reproduced. But it is not just elites who undertake this work; simply acting out socially defined roles and identities implicates dominated subjects in the transmission and reproduction of the very discourses and practices that constitute them as inferior. Indeed, power is most effective and most insidious where it is normalized, where self-expectation, self-regulation, and self-discipline generate compliant subjects who actively reproduce hegemonic assemblages of power without being "forced" to do so.

This model of power was conceived to explain modern Western Europe, but it has much to contribute to feminist projects in the developing world. In my own work on Zimbabwe, I have used it to show that men's power

to dominate sociosexual relations is an effect of the discourses and practices that simultaneously constitute gender and domestic space, not a capacity inherent in men themselves (Kesby 1996, 1999). Even violence, a seemingly "sovereign" expression of power, is enabled by social conventions that condone disciplining and sexual domination of women (Kesby 2000b; see also Ramazanoğlu and Holland 1993; Wood, Maforah, and Jewkes 1998). Foucault's useful model has a sting in its tail, however, for if power is everywhere, if it permeates and constitutes all social relations, then even democratic, emancipating discourses and practices must be entangled with power and contain forces of domination (see Foucault [1975] 1977; Sharp et al. 2000). It is with this barb that *The New Tyranny?* attacks participation. The comfortable assumption that participation is somehow distanced from power is disrupted by four penetrating criticisms.

First, although once marginal, participation is now so prevalent and legitimized that it constitutes a new dominating orthodoxy that excludes other possibilities for investigation and intervention (Cleaver 2001; Henkel and Stirrat 2001; see also Long and Villarreal 1996). This is what Cooke and Kothari term the "tyranny of techniques" (2001a, 8). Second, enthusiasm for participation can obscure rather than reveal local knowledges (Mohan 2001). This may result from "the tyranny of the group," where consultants prioritize community consensus over differentiation and consolidate dominant norms as "legitimated" participatory knowledge (Cooke and Kothari 2001a) but also from the assumption that participation's technologies are neutral tools (Cleaver 2001). In fact, the diagrams, sensitively managed discussions, and famously "relaxed" approach are already laden with the perspectives, values, and priorities of Western experts, and these shape the knowledge they produce (Kothari 2001; Mohan 2001). Moreover, the supposedly benign facilitators of participation are in fact rather domineering figures who determine both what can be known and how it can be known (Hailey 2001). This is what Cooke and Kothari term the "tyranny of decision-making and control" (2001a, 7). Thus one of my own attempts at participatory research, which encouraged Zimbabwean women to diagrammatically represent their sexual behavior (Kesby 2000b), could be read as condensing everyday complexities into linear and formalized representations (see Kothari 2001) and as generating visual, discursive, and public ways of knowing things that were once performed, nondiscursive, and privately experienced. It might also be interpreted as imposing an external sexual health priority on people who face many more immediate problems (Wallman 1998). The use of more indigenous forms of representation (e.g., dance, song, storytelling [Mohan 2001]) would not avoid these problems because they would still

constitute a frame through which participants' knowledge *becomes* (Henkel and Stirrat 2001). Therefore, rather than revealing subjugated knowledges and accessing silenced voices, participatory technologies and social relations actually create new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. Participatory approaches are inseparable from the exercise of power (Kothari 2001) and do not escape the poststructuralist critique of representation leveled at other forms of research (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Mohan 2001).

A third element of the critique reveals participation to be a form of what Foucault calls *governmentality* or *biopower*, the ways in which subjectivity is constituted within a constellation of powers and in which people continuously and permanently survey and govern themselves as an effect of those powers (Foucault [1979] 1991, [1981] 1988).[7] Thus the discourses and practices of participation powerfully govern the possibilities of behavior, reflection, representation, and action within a given arena of research or intervention. They produce new subject positions, principally that of "participant" (see Henkel and Stirrat 2001). Within the bounds of a project, participants must learn to constitute themselves as equal to their peers, as part of a collective, and as self-policing agents engaged in a rolling process of critical self-analysis. This is particularly obvious in HIV work because it encourages people to inspect their most intimate actions and explicitly seeks to govern behavior (Kesby et al. 2003). By participating, people establish that they require intervention and become implicated in normalizing the discourses and practices of participation. Meanwhile, participation's claim to inclusivity acts to exclude and delegitimize those who decline to participate (Cleaver 2001; Kothari 2001). Finally, through participation (particularly that sponsored by the World Bank) people are drawn into becoming the compliant subjects of the broader project of modernization, making empowerment through participation tantamount to what Foucault calls subjugation (Henkel and Stirrat 2001).

Using the term *performance* pejoratively, Kothari (2001) summarizes the existing poststructuralist critique: The arenas of a given project are a stage on which participants are invited to perform simplified dramatizations of their complex lives that make sense to an external audience. This context is a "front stage," a place in which performances are enacted in order to make an impression in public life. These project arenas cannot allow performers to be sincere because they are devoid of the "backstage" places where unrehearsed, private performances not intended for public consumption take place in rehearsal for the production of front-stage perfor-

[7] See Clayton 2000a, 2000b. Daniel Clayton offers excellent definitions of *governmentality* and *biopower*, which concisely draw together a diverse number of original Foucault sources.

mances. Participatory performances are contrived by stage-managing facilitators, who script events to meet project objectives using genres and props alien to the performers. Those who avoid this stage or lack the skills to act on it are excluded from the spaces in which new front-stage performances are being produced and legitimized (Cleaver 2001; Kothari 2001).

The limits of the existing poststructuralist critique of participation

Although contributors to *The New Tyranny?* provide an enormously valuable critique, neither they nor their editors provide many solutions to the problems raised or offer any viable substitute for the energy, optimism, and practical utility of participation. Heiko Henkel and Roderick Stirrat (2001, 183) call only for further deconstruction that focuses less on people "out there" and more on a self-reflexive critique of the "discourses, institutions and practices [of development]." Kothari (2001, 152) can suggest only that performers seek something like empowerment through acts of resistance to participation (e.g., deluding their external audiences [see also Foucault (1976) 1978, 95]). Harry Taylor (2001, 136) hopes that manipulative and inauthentic participation will be replaced by a "genuinely radical . . . challenge from below" resulting from a "*spontaneous* coming together of . . . individuals and groups who see their common subordination to . . . capitalism." This relative dearth of suggestions simply leaves readers depressed by the revelation that participation is a form of power.

I want to remain optimistic, however, about both participation and poststructuralism. I feel that my own discipline, human geography, is already replete with self-reflexivity, and participatory approaches seem to offer one useful way to respond to poststructuralist critiques about ethics and representation (Kesby 2000a, 2000b). Moreover, my research on Stepping Stones (Kesby et al. 2002) makes me hopeful that participation can bring about positive transformation in ordinary people's lives by opening material spaces in which ordinary people themselves can identify the nature and limits of local knowledge, renegotiate sociosexual behavior, and improve communication around HIV (Kesby 2003).

For me, *The New Tyranny?* lacks proportion in its discussion of power. Certainly Foucault ([1983] 1984, 343) was right to suggest that "everything is dangerous" and that even emancipatory discourses are systems of power with the capacity to dominate, but it is important to recognize that some things are more dangerous than others. Foucault's own death from an AIDS-related illness illustrates this: while contemporary "safe sex" is undoubtedly a power that we might expect to be resisted (Kesby et al.

2003), Foucault's own experiences in the gay bathhouses of late 1970s San Francisco (see Millar 2000) would have been a lot less dangerous had this form of biopower governed behavior at that time. By contextualizing my discussion within the maelstrom of sub-Saharan Africa's HIV pandemic, I am trying to restore a sense of proportion to the poststructuralist critique (see Ramazanoğlu and Holland 1993 on feminism and Foucault). In this context, participation cannot be viewed as the most oppressive form of governance shaping people's lives. In this situation it seems more important to help people resist the transmission of HIV than to urge them to resist the power effects of participatory HIV projects. To those facing poverty, gender inequality, and HIV, calls for resistance to *all* forms of power are unnecessarily immobilizing (see Robinson 2000) and must seem to emanate from a rather privileged positionality.

By evoking but not theorizing resistance, the editors and contributors of *The New Tyranny*? reintroduce the very binary logic for which they pillory participation (see Kothari 2001; Mohan 2001), this time in the form power = bad/resistance = good. In fact, resistance is not power's polar opposite but is itself entangled with domination (Sharp et al. 2000); even "tyrannical" participation began as resistance to earlier development orthodoxies. Indeed, the reification of resistance is itself "dangerous," since not all forms of rebellion can be celebrated: resistance to a participatory project might be motivated by a desire to maintain the marginalization of women and youth in a community. The book's failure to theorize the second part of its own binary means it also remains largely silent about the catalysts and frameworks that will make resistance practicable. Only Taylor's (2001) vision is clear, but it rests on a set of assumptions about the catalyzing role that Marxist power/knowledge will play in framing a more "authentic" consciousness. The book's more poststructuralist editors are unable to concur with Taylor's modernist analysis, but neither do they deconstruct it, and so they remain caught between two impossible positions: yearning for a form of knowledge and action beyond power yet fearful that the pervasive and "unauthored" nature of power makes "authentic/spontaneous" resistance impossible (see Sharp et al. 2000). Thus Frances Cleaver (2001) might well suggest that advocates of participation need a better understanding of individual action, but her fellow contributors would also benefit from a closer inspection of the connections between structure and agency as they relate to the nature and sources of resistance.

Unstable frameworks of power and processes of resistance and change

If we are to say something more practical than that power is everywhere and must be resisted everywhere, we must read Foucault more closely. While he stressed power's pervasiveness, he also emphasized its instability: assemblages of discourse and practice require constant reproduction and reperformance in order to achieve the appearance of permanence. Yet they continually undergo mutation and, occasionally, transformation. The key question is, how?

Lise Nelson (1999, 338–41) argues that Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) interpretation of Foucault's ideas is rather too structural and can explain change only via two kinds of "accidental" systemic "slippage" (see also Robinson 2000). First, because categories like gender are social constructs, not innate identities, subjects can fail to flawlessly reperform the discourses and practices that constitute them: for example, Zimbabwean women who become de facto heads of migrant men's households insufficiently reenact dependent forms of subjectivity, thereby introducing unsettling contradictions into understandings of femininity. Second, a surplus of meaning can open up within a discursive pairing, subverting the dominant interpretation of that dualism, as, for example, when homosexuality exceeds its meaning as heterosexuality's deviant other and begins to disturb the supposed normality of heterosexuality.

While systemic slippages undoubtedly occur, the elimination of human agency in Butler's reading underplays Foucault's later emphasis on agents' ability to fashion themselves (Sharp et al. 2000) and also fails to rework Anthony Giddens's ([1984] 1986) insights into structure and agency, a relationship central to geographers' interest in spatially embedded, intentional human practices and historical/geographical change (Nelson 1999). My own empirical investigations have often recorded the conscious strategizing of individuals day to day and across the life course—women attempting to provoke change in domestic relations through appeals to sexual health discourses learned in participatory projects and men attempting to suture threatening breaches in meaning by tactically reevoking tradition (Kesby 2000b). The central role of agency is also evident in the "systemic landslides" of history: Zimbabwean women have actively exploited the opening of missions, mines, and towns as a means to exit the rural arenas in which prevailing femininities are most readily replicated, while men have appealed to the state to return "runaway girls" to the reserves, reempower traditional authorities, and clear urban streets of "prostitutes" (Kesby 1996, 1999). Clearly, at moments of crisis

in gender relations, subjects act with conscious purposeful agency either to stabilize inherently volatile networks of power or to force open spaces for resistance and change within and between presently available discourses and practices.

Thus I think a Foucauldian understanding of power can and must encompass a central role for conscious, reflexive agency. It might even be possible to accommodate the lexicon of structuration if we say that the tactics and strategies (or agency) of individuals generate emergent constellations (or structures) of power that form an envelope of possibility in which the double conditioning (or structuration) of these subjects (or agents), who both bare and reproduce power, takes place. Such a synthesis only works, however, if Giddens's ([1984] 1986) tendency to privilege agency in his "duality" is resisted. While unstable and requiring reproduction, power also has a durability in time and space over and above its immediate instantiation by reflective agents (Clegg 1989). Moreover, agency and self-reflexivity are not the attributes of individual actors but must be understood as constituted and achieved through available discursive and practical means (see Clegg 1989, 138–48). Thus, while conscious and reflexive, agency is also partial, positioned, and informed by a situated consciousness of one's location and interests within an evolving constellation of powers (Kesby 1999; Nelson 1999). This being said, human beings do have a capacity for invention (see Thrift 2000), can draw inspiration from a wide variety of sources simultaneously (e.g., various discourses and practices, historical precedents, memories, role models, embodied capacities, spatial arrangements, etc.), and often do so selectively, incompletely, and with many contradictions. This is bound to generate dynamism and hybridity, even though agents are drawing on available structural resources. Thus, while agency is framed by power, power, resistance, and transformation can all be produced by situationally conscious human action, not simply by systemic logic or its accidental slippage.

In development studies, the "actor-oriented" school discusses these themes within its project to investigate interface situations (the locales in which exogenous development interventions intersect with the lifeworlds of endogenous people [Long 1989, 1992b; Long and Villarreal 1996; see also Clegg 1989]). Actor-oriented scholars suggest that agents constantly struggle to manipulate available networks of power in order to achieve their situated interests. All agents attempt this, but some (e.g., intervening NGOs) are better positioned than others (e.g., ordinary village folk) to maximize their "strategic agency" and (literally) recruit others into facilitating their projects (Long and Villarreal 1989; Long 1992a, 1992b). However, this process of enrollment is never simple or complete

because (in the absence of violence) power relies on compliance (Clegg 1989; Long 1992b), and compliance can be disrupted by the reflexivity of enrollees who, drawing on other available frameworks of power, can exercise discretion, innovation, or resistance. Hence agents are frequently able to create room to maneuver between endogenous forms of power and knowledge and those, like participation, introduced by intervening agencies, thereby transforming the latter in the pursuit of their own projects (Long and Villarreal 1996). However, the actor-oriented account has a Giddensian overemphasis on agency and the active instantiation of enrollment into specific projects. Broader frameworks structuring agency ensure that self-disciplining actors often enroll *themselves* into the projects of others.

While actor-oriented analysts better understand resistance, they share *The New Tyranny?*'s hostility to participation. The "dilemma . . . of empowerment," they suggest, is to impose priorities and agendas while claiming to enhance communities' capacity to determine their own (Long and Villarreal 1996, 160; see also Clegg 1989, 95). Notwithstanding this tension, the dilemma of actor orientation is that its determination to distinguish itself from *action*-oriented approaches and its refusal to deploy participatory technologies leave it precious few means to actually "offer a useful framework for [*ordinary*] people to analyze their *own* life circumstances and to assess possible strategies for action" (Long 1992a, 272; emphasis added; see also Long 1992b; Long and Villarreal 1996). While it may be grounded in everyday life experiences, "place actors at centre stage" (Long 1992c, 5), and seek to avoid the "dichotomization of . . . theory and practice" (Long 1992a, 276), the actor-oriented approach resists becoming "actor-centred" (Long 1992a, 277; see also Long and Villarreal 1996). It therefore remains a rather conventional mode of expert analysis useful to researchers and perhaps practitioners but not the ordinary folk supposedly at the heart of its endeavors. Most frustratingly, while insisting that unless the concept of empowerment develops a more sophisticated understanding of power and agency "it will become . . . relegated to the dusty shelves of the archives of development policy" (Long 1992a, 276), proponents of the actor-oriented school decline to provide such a theorization.

Interestingly, the actor-oriented school uses Stewart Clegg's (1989) work to argue that participation is a form of power that should be resisted but neglects to add that his work could also be used to argue that participation can enable resistance. Clegg proposes that people frequently comply with their subordination because they "lack the organisational resources to outmanoeuvre existing networks . . . of power" (1989, 19;

see also 223). They may lack the knowledge resources to construct a credible alternative, be isolated from similarly positioned individuals, or believe that the high costs of resistance outweigh the slim chances of success. In light of this, Clegg (1989, 207) postulates two basic types of resistance: that which resists the exercise of power but leaves frameworks unchallenged and, more rarely, that which "outflanks" existing frameworks because it is capable of consolidating itself into a new form of power.

These ideas are hugely significant to the debate about whether participatory power can only ever be resisted by participants and radicals, never complied with or deployed. On Clegg's account, hopes for spontaneous resistance untainted by power yet capable of transformation are unrealistic. Location at the margin might provide radical perspectives (see hooks 1990; Rose 1993, 155–59), but these perspectives will not constitute an agency capable of outflanking dominant frameworks unless mobilized through alternative forms of power such as feminism or participation (see Desbiens 1999). Thus, power and resistance are entangled: "Resistance involves power, it requires it, releases it and generates effects of power . . . and it is only because there is power in resistance that we can be . . . optimistic . . . that resistance will happen" (Sharp et al. 2000, 31). Interestingly, while Joanne Sharp and her colleagues emphasize the creativity of human agency in their text, they relegate to a footnote the idea that to achieve "self-conscious intentionality [people] cannot avoid drawing upon a wider terrain of 'helpful discourses'" (35). Yet this point is absolutely central, at least to the debate about whether participation is a form of power that can facilitate resistance. If there is no escape from power, then surely we have no choice but to draw on less dominating frameworks in order to destabilize and transform more dominating forms of power. Thus participation's proven failure to escape from power and its association with governance do not inherently prevent it from being one of many helpful discourses on which to draw in the pursuit of a radical, transformative political praxis. Indeed, on Clegg's (1989) account, it is precisely because of its capacity to govern, to organize, and to reconstitute the strategic agency of both interveners and endogenous people (potentially with a degree of reciprocity and mutuality) that participation in its most radical, flexible, and self-reflexive manifestations can hope to facilitate resistance to something as tyrannical as HIV/AIDS.

From this perspective, Kothari's (2001) suggestion that the front-stage performances of participation are contrived in comparison to the authentic, unrehearsed behavior of the back stage seems too Goffmanesque (Goffman 1959) and too dramaturgical (see Gregson and Rose 2000;

Thrift and Dewsbury 2000).[8] *All* social identity is a contrived performance achieved via compliance with dominant frameworks of power. (The private performance of very publicly sanctioned gendered and sexual identities in the backstage spaces of the bedroom provides a good example.) Regardless of the "stage," agents are always actors whose conduct is guided by scripts that structure the field of their possible action (see Foucault [1983] 1984; Clegg 1989, 17). Performance is a citational practice and always saturated with power (Gregson and Rose 2000). Even when "improvising" (see Thrift and Dewsbury 2000), agents draw inspiration from the many helpful repertoires available. Thus the crucial difference between a performance in a participatory arena and one on either the front or back stage of everyday life might simply be that its contrived nature is more readily perceived in that participatory arena. However, this transparency may help expose the contrived and performative nature of *all* social relations, which in turn may enable actors to imagine acting differently. Thus participatory programs may provide organizational frameworks through which strategic agency can be reconstituted in ways that can outflank existing power structures. This is precisely what programs like Stepping Stones attempt. It is entirely the opposite of what Kothari (2001) imagines: by contriving the dramatization of risky situations on the participatory front stage, programs like Stepping Stones can offer participants an arena in which to rehearse for reality various lifesaving practices (e.g., saying no to sexual advances, negotiating condom use, using assertive language) that they can try to reperform on the everyday back stage.

I believe this discussion of participation reveals that the current obsession with deconstruction and resistance obscures the central role that reconstruction and empowerment play in explaining how change actually occurs in practice and how transformation might realistically be facilitated. The philosophy of perpetual deconstruction is ignorant of its own privileged situatedness. People at the margin know that vacuums in meaning are easily filled by resurgent domineering powers. If ordinary people are to deconstruct existing structures and then hold them at bay (let alone stay sane [see Robinson 2000]), they require new powers to provide some guidance for alternative living. My empirical studies tend to confirm this: Zimbabwean women have affected changes in gender relations only by drawing on an ensemble of available resources such as Christianity, free

[8] Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical account assumes that behind the scenes of contrived front-stage public performances lie more truthful and authentic identities. These, he suggests, can be observed on the private back stage, where individuals are not playing to an audience.

market economics, nationalism, socialism, (some) customary law, and feminism (as well as hybrid combinations of these) (Kesby 1999). Thus, while participation must be conceived as a form of power and its tyrannical tendencies resisted, because it provides an alternative guide for living it can also be conceived as a valuable resource on which women and men can draw in order to challenge the status quo. Participation could potentially constitute a poststructurally aware form of power/knowledge capable of empowering agents to bring about transformations in their own lives, something Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland (1993, 250–53), Gillian Rose (1993, 158), and Caroline Desbiens (1999, 181) have said of feminism. To sustain this assertion, however, requires that we take up Norman Long's (1992a) challenge and retheorize the notion of empowerment.

Reconceptualizing empowerment

Empowerment finds no place within human geography's contemporary lexicon. Volumes on power (Sharp et al. 2000) and dictionaries of terms (Johnston et al. 2000) simply avoid it, while even feminist glossaries convey a sense of embarrassment about empowerment's link to a passé notion of identity politics (see McDowell and Sharp 1999). Nevertheless, a poststructuralist retheorization of empowerment is both possible and overdue. *Empowerment* could acknowledge the entanglements of power more explicitly than the terms *resistance* or *resisting power*, which even in the hands of Sharp et al. (2000) can put distance between power and resistance. It might also emphasize the positive, creative capacities of power more effectively than the negative notion of *resistance to*. Crucially, poststructuralist theory might travel farther if it encouraged people to reconceptualize rather than abandon their long-standing commitment to the concept of empowerment.

In development studies *empowerment* is common parlance yet remains poorly theorized.[9] Discussions tend to focus on five issues: practical obstacles to empowerment (Leurs 1996), empowerment's depoliticization and cooptation by technocratic mainstream development (Guijt and Shah 1998; Cleaver 2001), whether empowerment through participation simply transfers costs and responsibilities but not decision-making power to participants (Long and van der Ploeg 1989; Mohan and Stokke 2000), whether groups or only individuals can gain empowerment (Wallerstein 1992; Stein 1997), and whether limited-life-span participatory projects actually disempower

[9] See Wallerstein 1992; Batliwala 1994; Baylies and Bujra 1995; Guijt and Shah 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001a.

participants by giving them a sense of their problems but no means to tackle them (Nelson and Wright 1995). Definitions are more difficult to come by but can be characterized, using Foucauldian terminology, as providing a sovereign view of empowerment. Thus, people are imagined as "possessing" empowerment and thereby "holding" the capacity to act in particular ways (see Rappaport 1987). Through empowerment, people previously denied the ability to make strategic (as opposed to everyday) choices in their lives gain that ability (Kabeer 1999). While like (sovereign) power in some ways, empowerment is imagined as distanced from it in others. Rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few, it is redistributed among the many; rather than being hierarchical, vertical, dominating, and exploitative, it is reciprocal, lateral, accountable, and facilitating; rather than power *over* others, it describes power *with* others.[10] In addition, becoming empowered is understood as a linear process of enlightenment. Whether inspired by Freirian consciousness raising (Freire [1970] 1996, 18; see also Wallerstein 1992; De Koning and Martin 1996; Stein 1997) or second-wave feminist (Stanley and Wise 1983) consciousness raising, empowerment is said to involve a journey of self-discovery. This takes place through some sort of awareness training, politicization process, and/or life event that stimulates a recursive movement between experience, reflection, and action for change. From this emerges a realization that one can free oneself from helping to reproduce the status quo and can instead seize control over the material and discursive processes that govern daily life. Once "attained," such enlightenment fills individuals with self-efficacy and a sense of connection with those sharing a similar positionality. Accordingly, empowerment can never be delivered: outsiders can only facilitate insiders' struggle to "take" or "achieve" it for themselves. However, individual transformation is only the vital first stage: empowerment must develop into collective forms of struggle if people are to challenge hegemonic formations by changing the laws and institutions of society.[11]

While inspiring, this formulation of empowerment is not compatible with the poststructuralist notions of agency, change, and resistance developed earlier. I therefore make the following six suggestions to close the gap between the two positions. First, explore the similarities, not the

[10] See Maguire 1987; Wallerstein 1992; Batliwala 1994; Chambers 1994, 1997; Stein 1997; Allen 1999.

[11] See Rappaport 1987; Lather 1991; Friedmann 1992; Wallerstein 1992; Batliwala 1994; Chambers 1994; Baylies and Bujra 1995; Edwards 1996; Leurs 1996; Hagey 1997; Stein 1997; Crawley 1998.

differences, between power and empowerment. Neither is a commodity to be held or redistributed. Both are the effects of discourses and practices that produce power/empowerment. Second, conceive of empowerment as entangled with, not distanced from, power. Participation involves governance of participants' and facilitators' behavior. It entails the enrollment of participants into the projects of interveners and participants' subsequent enrollment of others into their new empowering projects. Successful, sustainable empowerment outflanks existing frameworks by constituting, deploying, and normalizing new powers. Third, recognize that organizational frameworks capable of enabling social transformation will occasion instances of domination and thus radical (as opposed to reactionary) forms of resistance. These must be anticipated and answered positively, but just as feminists have addressed race, class, and heterosexual dominance within feminism, it can be done without abandoning the whole project. Fourth, acknowledge that empowered agency is the achieved effect of powerful discourses and practices such as participation or feminism and is therefore partial, situated, and subject to future challenge and transformation. The radical legitimacy of a retheorized empowerment lies in its self-recognition that it is a contestable, imperfect work in progress (see Rose 1993, 160). Fifth, be confident that the radical utility of a retheorized empowerment lies in its preparedness to deploy forms of governance such as participation as the only practical means to outflank forms of power that are more oppressive and less self-reflexive. Finally, appreciate that the discourses and practices that affect empowerment require repeated performance if they are to be stabilized within a new grid of powers. The microscale performances of agents must be "double conditioned" by the establishment of grand alignments of discourse and practice on which agents can repeatedly and strategically draw.

Reconceptualizing empowerment along these lines has important implications for those seeking to facilitate transformation through participation in situations like those I have described in southern Africa. However, the example of participatory HIV projects raises one further dimension that demands urgent attention.

Spatializing empowerment through participation

Empowerment and participation have primarily been conceived in temporal terms, even by geographers (e.g., Allen 1999). This results from the linear model of "enlightenment" that underlies empowerment (e.g., Batliwala 1994) but is compounded by the linearity of the "project life cycle" that frames many participatory interventions (see Long and van der Ploeg

1989). Typically, debates focus on moments of transformation and empowerment's indeterminate end results (Baylies and Bujra 1995; Edwards 1996), the need for longitudinal research (Rappaport 1987), and the necessity to engage with participating communities over an extended time period (Guijt and Shah 1998). In short, it is said that empowerment through participation takes time and will fail if initiatives do not last long enough.

By comparison, the spatial dimensions of participation and empowerment remain underdeveloped. Jane Stein's elaborate summary diagram (1997, 286–87) gives no hint that any of her stages of empowerment are embedded in space in any way. While authors often refer to "settings" and "contexts" and the need for "ecological" understandings of empowerment (Rappaport 1987; Wallerstein 1992), the embeddedness imagined is primarily cultural, social, and historical, not spatial. To be sure, spatial terminology frequently appears but usually in rather abstract ways: participation "opens spaces" for empowerment (Stein 1997, 51) and enables people to perceive themselves as "occupying decision-making space" (Crawley 1998, 26). While the actor-oriented school is full of encounter *horizons*, battle*fields* of knowledge, and actors creating *space* for their projects, proponents consistently fail to conceive "interface situations" as spatial arenas (despite, in one case, their own data suggesting that Mexican women's strategic agency varied considerably depending on whether they were in project arenas, their own homes, or the decision-making forums of the community [see Long 1989; Long and Villarreal 1989, 1996]). Occasionally, authors have hinted at a more concrete spatiality. David Mosse (1994) describes participatory interventions as formal public events that constitute risky spaces in which established conventions might be either challenged or reaffirmed (see also Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (1998), meanwhile, seek forums for dialogue between the genders but worry that women's conflicting domestic commitments may prevent them from entering these spaces. Finally, Andrea Cornwall (1998) argues that gendered behavior may be different in one setting than in another. These observations notwithstanding, a coherent spatialized account of participation and empowerment eludes existing accounts.

The tendency to ignore or engage only metaphorically with spatiality is not uncommon. While feminist literature revolves around notions like public versus private and center versus margin, theorists like Judith Butler raise but do not pursue the issue of "what performances *where*" will facilitate the transformation of dominant discourses and practices (1990, 139, emphasis added; see also Robinson 2000), and there is little room

for material space in Butler's conceptualization of gendered performances (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Meanwhile, I think that geographer Jenny Robinson's attempt to reveal the "spatial imaginaries" (2000, 285) of three other feminist theorists actually confirms that they locate the source of change in gender relations within temporal zones (an arcane childhood stage, the present, or a distant future) and fails to explain how these abstract zones of transformation are connected to real struggles in material spaces and places. Thus, while geographers have worked hard to spatialize identities, many are themselves guilty of developing rather abstract, metaphorical geographies, especially when it comes to questions of transformation (e.g., Rose's [1993] notion of "paradoxical space" and Edward Soja's [1996] "third space"). By comparison, Paul Routledge's (1996, 1997) empirical investigation of contemporary protest movements illustrates that resistance is embedded in space and place and that transformation requires material, not simply conceptual, spaces in which to develop. Vera Chouinard (1994, 1996) is similarly insightful but stops short of suggesting that empowerment requires a space conducive to its performance (even though the performances of her disabled respondents must have been acutely relational to sociomaterial environments). Building on these latter studies and drawing again on Foucault's philosophy, I want to suggest that participation and empowerment must be conceived as embedded in material space.

While Foucault admitted making few explicit references to space in his most famous works ([1976] 1980; see also Soja 1996) and made fewer to gender (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 1993), he has much to offer to a discussion of space and empowerment. Surprisingly, his posthumously published essay "Of Other Spaces" (Foucault and Miskowiec [1967] 1986) is not the best source; here his account of heterotopias is frustratingly incoherent (Soja 1996). Moreover, rather than being a manifesto about spaces of resistance (see Tamboukou 2000), these musings are a prelude to his later works on the embeddedness of power within particular sites. Thus, while he suggests that heterotopias are mirrors that reflect back on all society's other sites in ways that "contest," "invert," and "reveal them as illusory" (Foucault [1976] 1980, 24), his examples of "countersites" actually are either primarily implicated in the production of power, not resistance (e.g., prisons, religious sites, and puritanical colonies); function to dissipate, not propagate, resistance (e.g., initiation rites/sites that simultaneously shape the dangerous energies of youth while obscuring the centrality of women's bodies in social reproduction); or facilitate, not frustrate, the reproduction of dominant frameworks of power (e.g., nineteenth-century brothels that exposed the fraud of Vic-

torian morality while simultaneously perpetuating it by containing potentially disruptive "immorality").[12] Nevertheless, while an uncritical application of the term *heterotopias* is unhelpful, a logical extension of Foucault's later works suggests that like power, the discourses and practices constituting empowerment are likely to be embedded in, and be constitutive of, particular material sites and spaces. Moreover, if, as with power, repeated performance is necessary to stabilize empowerment's effects, then it is important to think about the spaces that enable such performances. Thus, despite previous neglect, space seems central to an understanding of participatory power and may shed light on such key questions as "Can participation facilitate empowerment?" and "What factors encourage or discourage empowerment?"[13]

Returning once again to the example of participatory HIV/AIDS interventions, we can observe that they constitute temporary time-space social arenas within target communities. These open up in a variety of everyday settings (beneath a tree, in a community hall, etc.) but constitute special "other spaces" governed by discourses and practices quite unlike those that order everyday space and agency. Within them, normal frameworks of privilege are circumvented by the discourses and practices of equity, free speech, and collaboration. Participants condone the positioning of facilitators as powerful agenda setters and arbiters in ways that enable interveners to manage discussion of controversial issues, mediate disputes, and prevent those occupying dominant subject positions from silencing others. Meanwhile, participants can draw on the techniques of participation in order to construct themselves as reflexive agents and constitute/represent their opinions and experiences to themselves, one another, and facilitators. Within this field, opportunities open up for people, first, to disentangle the complex web of everyday life (e.g., tracing connections between use of alcohol, commercial/coercive sex, and HIV infection); second, to deconstruct norms and conventions; third, to reflect on the performativity of everyday life; and finally, to rehearse performances for alternative realities. In short, the discourses and practices circulating within and constituting the "other spaces" of participation are the same ones that constitute and facilitate the performance of empowered agency. This power may not be indigenous or supply absolute insights, but it does provide a resource that is more flexible and less domineering than many

[12] Foucault might not approve of my use of *Victorian* here, given that the brothels he was referring to were no doubt French. However, the term does convey a meaning about morality even if some readers would dispute its utility to describe a universal epoch.

[13] See Rappaport 1987; Wallerstein 1992; Crawley 1998; Cleaver 2001.

on which participants already draw; it does generate material sites in which knowledges, skills, and performances capable of outflanking existing constellations of gendered power can come into being.

So perhaps participatory arenas can provide concrete spaces of resistance and tangible paradoxical spaces (i.e., beyond dominant powers but in the here and now, not some distant utopian future/zone [see Desbiens 1999]). Perhaps they can provide heterotopic locations of reflection from within which to contest, invert, and reveal as illusory the spaces and relations of everyday life. Perhaps they can constitute arenas in which the performance of empowered agency can become possible. If we are to achieve this optimistic topography, however, further careful thought about the spatial dimensions of empowerment through participation is required.

Participatory arenas open up within existing societies/geographies. As Norman Long and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (1989) insist, planned interventions must not be conceived as isolated in time and space but as part of broader social, cultural, historical, (and spatial) processes. These press in on and permeate participatory arenas, preventing them from being too coherent and self-contained (see Gregson and Rose 2000), never quite beyond patriarchy. Thus, although participatory governance is powerful, no amount of sensitive facilitation can dissolve all power relations among participants or enable their unfettered speech (see Ellsworth 1989). People rarely limit their perceptions to "the program" (Long and van der Ploeg 1989; Wallman 1998), and their willingness to draw on the helpful powers of participation will be affected by their imminent return to the power-soaked everyday spaces that surround them. Moreover, the public nature of participatory technology links the right to speak with the consequences of doing so and, as with other forms of qualitative inquiry, exposes the marginalized to the risk of inadvertently revealing their survival strategies (see Ellsworth 1989). Embedding participation in this way may help to explain observable slippages in its powers: for example, marginalized groups' continued self-muting despite being presented with the organizational means to recraft their positionalities. Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose's recent (2000) account of the spatiality of performativity tends to neglect this impact of spatial structure, and yet location and geographical comparison are key elements of situated consciousness. For example, a participant in a project might think, "This is a space in which it seems possible to act differently/'do gender' differently, but this is not where I am most of the time, so is it prudent to act differently here?" Thus, part of what makes participatory space paradoxical is that while it is brought into being by performances that can facilitate empowerment, relations constituted elsewhere may curtail empowered performances within it.

A second reason to avoid mapping unproblematic heterotopias of reflection and reconstitution arises from the idea that empowerment is an effect of the discourses and practices that constitute and govern the temporary time-space social arenas of participation. How then are empowered performances to be sustained beyond this field in everyday spaces governed and constituted by quite different powers (particularly if, as with HIV interventions, they seek to facilitate empowered decision making in the most private, power-filled spaces of the home)? In the literature, sustainability is treated as a technical or ethical problem (see Maguire 1987, 57), the remedy for which is for interventions to take more *time* (e.g., Blackburn and Holland 1998, 171). However, if empowerment is not a linear process of enlightenment but a repetitive performance in *space*, then it is likely that it is the ephemeral nature of the participatory environment, as much as the limited life span of projects, that undermines the sustainability of empowerment. Thus, although planned interventions cannot be separated from the general social milieu, they very often do constitute discrete sociospatial arenas. Many participatory projects are relatively short or one-time exercises that aim to provide the catalyst for sustainable action but often prove unsustainable once the external team withdraws (see Leurs 1996; Preston-Whyte and Dalrymple 1996) and the arena of empowerment they sponsored implodes. Some of the fragility that besets new knowledge repertoires introduced by interveners (see Long and Villarreal 1996) can be explained by the difficulties actors experience when attempting to draw on these knowledges once they are outside carefully managed project arenas: so an ex-participant might think, "I know there is/was another space in which I acted quite differently, so why is it so hard for me to act that way here?"

The answer to this question is of course that consciousness, agency, and performance are sociospatially relational. If university students find it hard to maintain their empowerment outside the supportive feminist classroom (Lather 1991, 142), how much more difficult will it be for ex-participants of HIV programs in rural Zimbabwe, who must reenter arenas heavy with gendered meanings that are easily manipulated by those eager to reposition them within existing frameworks of power (see also Ramazanoğlu and Holland 1993, 260)? Karla Meursing's (1997) limited success (after intensive one-on-one counseling) in catalyzing sustainable behavior change among HIV-positive Zimbabweans returning to their own communities indicates the dangers of simply "enlightening" participants without considering how empowered performances are to be transported to and reproduced within everyday life spaces. Other geographers interested in the spatiality of performance have not addressed this problem.

Gregson and Rose (2000) enthuse about alternative social relations of consumption developed at car-boot sales but give few substantive examples of how they influence mainstream society despite citing many examples of how mainstream society affects these alternative relations of consumption. Rose (1997), meanwhile, records but does not develop the point that participants in an Edinburgh women's HIV/AIDS project felt the need to reenter that space *every day* in order to reperform the positive identities developed there and gain the strength needed to live the rest of their lives.

A major challenge for the future is to identify the factors that enable the sustained reperformance of empowerment beyond the carefully managed environments constituted and governed by participatory power. One tactic (pursued by the Edinburgh project) is to open permanent project spaces in which empowerment can continually be reperformed. However, this risks project dependency or impracticality in situations of limited resources. Another is to establish self-sustaining social groups that, post-intervention, will periodically reconstitute arenas governed by the discourses and practices of participation. Stepping Stones attempts this through the propagation of age- and sex-specific peer groups. It also attempts to arm participants (particularly women) with the tool of assertive language that can be carried back to their homesteads. My ongoing field research shows that peer groups are popular during the project life cycle because of their independence from the family, church, and customary institutions but later prove difficult to sustain if NGOs do not continue to provide periodic facilitation and material support. Similarly, assertive language soon gets reinterpreted as a form of traditional politeness in the absence of "facipulation" (see n. 6 in this article; Kesby et al. 2002; see also Cornwall 1998). A fourth possibility is for interventions to mobilize preexisting groupings and support local initiatives that have a presence independent of an issue-specific intervention and to feed participatory discourses and practices into these networks and forums (see Baylies and Bujra 1995; De Koning and Martin 1996). Whatever the approach, the discourses and practices that enable empowered performances will need to become normalized if their effects are to be sustainable, and this will involve their becoming embedded in (and therefore transforming) everyday spaces (see Lefebvre [1974] 1991; see also Robinson 2000). A virus metaphor for participation (Blackburn and Holland 1998, 167) is useful (despite Giles Mohan's [1999] reservations), especially when thinking about HIV interventions: if empowerment through participation is to become endemic in a host community, its discourses and practices must escape from the project laboratory and circulate virulently among the

population. Failing this, participatory projects will simply produce temporary carnivalesque arenas that allow yet contain a "ritual of rebellion" against prevailing frameworks (see Preston-Whyte and Dalrymple 1996, 166).[14] Advocates must find ways to prevent participatory projects from becoming like Foucault's brothels—heterotopias from which to reflect on the world but not to change it.

Finally and briefly, I want to link what I have said about space to what others have said about scale. When subjects leave a local site of participation, their feelings of empowerment are unlikely to survive unless "double conditioned" by collective action at a wider scale.[15] The HIV example illustrates that participants in a village project are linked via sexual networks to other communities across a variety of geographical scales. Moreover, their vulnerability results from national and international socioeconomic structures, not simply from their own decision making. Thus, if ex-participants are to sustain empowered performances in their everyday lives, then social relations constituted at other scales must be conducive to those performances. As James Blackburn and Jeremy Holland (1998, 1, 169) suggest, participation must be "scaled up" and its discourses and practices embedded in the management structures of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, not just in their community projects. Moreover, the "politics scale" (Smith 1993; Mohan and Stokke 2000) could become projects for participatory activity itself. Participants could reflect on the national and international, not just the local, sources of their vulnerability to HIV, and their communities could be linked with national and international HIV/AIDS organizations in ways that would allow each to draw on the other's resources and contribute to their decision-making processes. Issues of scale and rescaling are likely to be central to the project of embedding empowering discourses and practices in everyday arenas.

Conclusions

Participation is a form of power, and when it really does tyrannize it must be resisted. However, a review of participatory power within the context of Africa's HIV pandemic helps expose the limitations of flat, relativist versions of poststructuralism. Certainly, participation can only be considered more legitimate and less dominating than the available alternatives

[14] Perhaps the World Bank has already made this calculation and so promotes "local participation" without fearing a threat to its global neoliberal strategy.

[15] See Rappaport 1987, 139; Wallerstein 1992; Stein 1997, 67; Crawley 1998, 29; Mohan 1999; Mohan and Stokke 2000.

if advocates recognize it as a situated, partial form of knowledge/power. Yet, because power cannot be escaped, judgments about degrees of tyranny must be made, and power will need to be deployed and succumbed to if transformation is to be effected. Ordinary people need alternative forms of self-governance (such as participation) on which to draw if they are to achieve the strategic agency necessary to deconstruct, resist, and outflank the most domineering powers (such as unequal gender relations) constituting their lives. In this article I have sought a more reciprocal exchange between participation and poststructuralism (and, despite Ramazanoğlu and Holland's [1993] reservations, between Foucault and feminism) in order to open up a space for a reconceptualized notion of empowerment that can strengthen theory but also inform practice. Those struggling to address the social causes of rapid HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa have much to gain from understanding empowerment as a contextual effect of embedded participatory discourses/practices. This perspective emphasizes that even where participatory technologies successfully facilitate the performance of empowered agency within the carefully managed arenas of project interventions, more needs to be done to enable people to sustainably reperform those empowered ways of being within the very differently constituted spaces of their everyday lives.

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